



OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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Linda McCulloch
Superintendent

August 2005

To: School Food Authority Administrators

From: Christine Emerson, Director
School Nutrition Programs

Re: **Instructions for Verification:** LEAs with **greater than** 80% response rate in the previous year

Congratulations! Your school had a greater than 80 percent response rate to verification last year. This means that your verification requirements will remain the same. Verification is the process by which Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) confirm the eligibility of a sample of approved applications for free and reduced-price meals. LEAs must submit the Summary of Verification form to this office by **December 15, 2005**. It is highly recommended that schools separate applications based on the categories listed on the Summary of Verification form (1.a through 2.b.). Separating the applications as they come in will ease the verification procedure immensely.

The following forms are available on our Web site and are required to successfully complete the verification process. If you have trouble downloading any of these forms, please contact our office at (406) 444-2501.

- Notification of Selection for Verification Letter (*front and back*)
- Notification of Results of Verification Letter

Verification does **not** apply to:

- Children in split-session kindergarten programs participating in the Special Milk Program;
- Residential Child Care Institutions, except for applications for attending day students; and
- Schools in non-base years using Special Provisions 2;
- *Households whose determinations were made through direct certification letters and lists;
- *Homeless, migrant and/or runaway students included on the respective liaison list; and
- *Non-applicants approved by local officials (Administrative Applications).

Please see the next page for instructions for the verification process. For more information, use the USDA's *Eligibility Guidance for School Meals* Manual:

www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Guidance/eligibility_guidance.pdf (starting on page 58) or call School Nutrition at (406) 444-2501. Thank you for your dedication to serving nutritious meals to children. If you need assistance, please contact Holly Humphrey at (406) 444-4413 or hhumphrey@mt.gov; or Kim Pullman at (406) 444-3532 or kpullman@mt.gov.

Enclosures

"It is the mission of the Office of Public Instruction to improve teaching and learning through communication, collaboration, advocacy, and accountability to those we serve."

Timeline for Verification Activities:

Beginning of School Year-October 1

- Collect and approve applications for free and reduced-price meals.

October 1

Count the number of family applications approved for free and reduced-price meals (1.a. through 2) as of **October 1**. The number of students approved as Free Eligible through Direct Certification Letter or List, Homeless Liaison List or Administrative Application must also be documented. **Do not verify applications starred (*) in list on cover memo.**

1. Choose either the random or focused sampling methods and calculate the number of applications to verify. See “Verification Sample Methods.”
2. Draw the required number of applications. At least one application must be verified.
3. Once the applications have been drawn for verification, a “preliminary review” must be conducted. A person other than the determining official must check the applications pulled for verification to ensure that they were determined correctly before the verification process can proceed.
4. Send prototype notification letters to the selected households.
 - The family should have ten (10) working days to submit income documentation.
 - Adverse action letters must give ten (10) calendar days from issuance as the last day for appeal during which student’s eligibility may continue.
 - **If a household does not respond, schools must follow-up with that household at least once before that household is deemed non-responsive and meal benefits are+ ceased.** See “Reducing the Burden of Verification.”
 - If a household selected for verification transfers out of the district before the information can be verified, a new application must be selected for verification.
5. Once responses have been received, re-determine the household’s benefits and send the prototype notification of results of verification letter to households.

November 15

- All verification activity must be completed by **November 15** (steps 1 through 5 above).

November 15-December 15

- Complete the Summary of Verification form and send to School Nutrition Programs by **December 15, 2005** (keep a copy on file at the school).

Keep copies of original applications, letters to households, and the Summary of Verification form.

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Verification Sample Methods: Choose either random or focused sampling.

The Summary of Verification enclosed reflects your school’s choice from last year. If you would like to use the other method, please contact our office.

Random Sample

This method requires the verification of 3 percent of approved applications on file as of October 1.

- Determine the sample size of 3 percent of all approved applications on file as of October 1 eligible for verification (1.b. through 2). Round fractions **up** to whole numbers.
 - At least one application must be verified.

Random Sample (continued):

- Draw a random sample from among these applications. Ways to take a random sample include:
 - Use a selection interval. Divide the total number of approved applications by the sample size to determine the selection interval. For example, if there are 160 applications and 5 is the sample size, divide 160 by 5 = 32. Randomly select every 32nd approved application until 5 applications are selected.
 - Ask someone in the office to randomly draw the required number of applications.
- Go on to number 2 on previous page.

Focused Sample

This method requires the verification of 1 percent of total approved applications on file as of October 1 selected from approved Non-Food Stamp error-prone** households (1.c. and 2) **plus** 0.5 percent of **applications** approved based on Food Stamp, FDPIR or TANF case numbers (1.b.).

1. Take the 1 percent portion of the sample:
 - *Calculate* the sample size of 1 percent from **all** approved applications on file as of October 1 (include ALL applications except those starred (*) on cover memo; 1.b. through 2). Round fractions up to whole numbers.
 - *Draw* the sample from only the error-prone applications.**
 - If there are more applications that meet the criteria than needed, select a random sample from those applications.
 - If there are not enough applications that meet the criteria, select applications that are closest to the income eligibility guidelines.
 - At least one income application must be verified if there are any such applications on file.
2. Take the 0.5 percent portion of the sample:
 - *Calculate* the sample size of one-half of one percent from the total number of applications approved based on Food Stamp, FDPIR, or TANF case number on file as of October 1 (1.b.). Round fractions up to whole numbers.
 - *Draw* the sample from the same applications using any method that is equitable and ensures that the same household is not selected each year.
 - At least one Food Stamp, FDPIR or FAIM application must be verified if there are any such applications on file.
3. Add the number of applications in the 1 percent sample to the number of applications from the 0.5 percent sample. This is your total number of applications to be verified.
4. Go on to number 2 on previous page.

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*****Error-Prone Applications:***

An error-prone application is an application approved on the basis of income, where the income is within \$100 monthly or \$1,200 annually of the Income Eligibility Guidelines cut-off points.

Please Note: The LEA has an obligation to verify all questionable applications (for cause). However, any verification that is done “for cause” is **in addition to** the sample required for the formal verification process (not to be included in random sampling).